



That familiar orange ball can be seen in play even in Tibet.

China's Yao Ming is more than just a basketball player who stands seven feet five inches tall. He is also an example of **globalization** in America's National Basketball Association (NBA).

The Houston Rockets chose Ming as their number one draft choice in 2002. Being drafted by the Rockets didn't mean that Ming could hop the first plane from China to Houston. He could leave China only if he had his government's permission. That left the Chinese government with quite a dilemma. They had to decide whether to let Ming go to the United States.

It was a classic globalization story in which a country had to decide whether it was in their best interest to let go of a valuable resource. In this case, the resource was Ming.

After much negotiating, the Chinese government allowed Ming to go to Houston. They brokered a deal that would benefit their country financially and, more importantly, grow their country's basketball program. The Rockets agreed to train members of Ming's Chinese team, the Shanghai Sharks, alongside their own players during the off-season. The deal gave Chinese athletes access to some of the best coaches in the world of basketball.

The Chinese government also required Ming to give them half of his salary. On top of that, he also had to agree to pay Chinese taxes on his salary and give a percentage of his earnings to the Shanghai Sharks.

China benefited more than just monetarily from their decision to release Ming to the United States. As China's one billion citizens watched Ming excel in the NBA, they became more interested in their own country's basketball teams. That was important to the Chinese government because

Globalization: The process of spreading objects and experiences to all people at all corners of the earth.

Basketball Without Borders

The Globalization of the NBA



The NBA recruits basketball players all over the world—including Yao Ming, from China. Here, Ming receives a gift from Sheikh Saud Bin Ali Al-Thani after a game in Japan.

they strive to build **nationalism** through sports. They believe that this will lead to more pride and **patriotism** among their citizens.

Ming is not the only foreign-born player in the NBA. There were 82 international players from 38 countries on the official rosters for the NBA's 2005-2006 season. Compare this to the six international players on the rosters in 1979.

The number of international players in the league began to grow in 1989 after professional basketball players were no longer barred from competing in the Olympics. This opened the door for international players to play for both the NBA and their country's Olympic basketball team.

After this, NBA teams began drafting globally and allocating large amounts of money to their

international scouting budgets. The NBA also established offices in Europe, Australia, and Asia. They realized that by tapping a global market they could choose players from a larger pool of talent.

Expanding into a global market has made the NBA popular throughout the world. Games are seen in 750 million households in 212 countries. This has led to a worldwide extension of American culture that has benefited many U.S. companies, including sneaker manufacturers.

Not everyone is as happy as those sneaker companies. Some critics of the NBA's globalization feel that the sport is being stripped of its "Americanism." They believe that basketball becomes less engaging here at home as more international players take the place of Americans. Some American players take jobs with European teams. More than one critic has suggested following China's lead and limiting the number of foreign-born players on each NBA team. China allows no more than two international players on each of its basketball teams.

Supporters of globalization argue that the popularity of basketball increased dramatically after the heavy recruitment of international players began. They believe that these players have only improved the game and made it more exciting.

There is no doubt that the debate over the globalization of the NBA will continue. In the meantime, the many talented international players will continue to do what they do best: shoot, block, rebound, and score.

Adapted from an article by Christine Graf

Nationalism: Loyalty to one's own country

Patriotism: Great love for one's country